

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

Maine Women's Publications - All

Publications

3-15-1988

Inform - A Quarterly Newsletter for Maine Women (March-April 1988)

The Maine Commission for Women Staff
The Maine Commission for Women

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/maine_women_pubs_all



Part of the [Women's History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Staff, The Maine Commission for Women, "Inform - A Quarterly Newsletter for Maine Women (March-April 1988)" (1988). *Maine Women's Publications - All*. 396.

https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/maine_women_pubs_all/396

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine Women's Publications - All by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

St. Docs.
N 84.2
In 3
/ March / April
1988
C.2

Inform

Published by The Maine Commission for Women

FROM THE CHAIR

This issue of the Inform focuses on the Maine Commission for Women's January conference "Winning with Women: The Time is Now." The conference, with Keynote Speaker Shirley Chisholm and special guest Iceland Parliament member Danfridur Skarphedinsdottir, was a tremendous success with over 350 people in attendance. The Northern Regional Commission for Women also recently held a successful "Winning with Women" conference in Presque Isle.

The Maine Commission has completed planning for the next few months. We have agreed to continue being involved with several committees: Displaced Homemakers Council, AFDC Advisory Council, Child Care Advisory Council, Medicaid Advisory Committee, Women's Legislative Agenda Coalition, Vocational Education Sex Equity Task Force, Board of Directors of the Kennebec Girl Scouts Council, Maine Coalition on Rape, and Women's History Month Consortium.

This legislative session has been very busy. The Commission has actively supported the Family Medical Leave Act, an increase in the minimum wage, and other bills of importance to Maine women. We are also very pleased to announce that there were not enough signatures for the Parental Consent referendum to be considered this session.

In this issue you will find a request for nominations for the Maine Commission for Women's 1988 Progress Awards. This is a new program designed to recognize individuals, businesses or organizations who have made a

difference in improving the lives of Maine women and their families. Anyone may nominate a person or organization and we encourage you to look in your community and your organizations -- these people do not need to be well known or to have been previously recognized for their contributions. The 1988 Progress Awards will be presented at our Annual Meeting which will be held on June 17, 1988 at the Augusta Civic Center (North Wing). A reservation form for the Annual Meeting is in this issue.

The Annual Meeting will be an opportunity for you to receive an update on the Commission's activities, to meet the members of the Maine Commission, as well as members of the Regional Commissions from northern, eastern and southern Maine. I hope many of you will be able to attend to help the Commission thank the individuals and organizations who have made a significant contribution to improving the lives of women and their families in Maine. I look forward to seeing you in June.

Patti Bourgoin

"WINNING WITH WOMEN: THE TIME IS NOW" A HUGE SUCCESS

The Maine Commission for Women's conference, "Winning With Women: The Time Is Now" was a huge success. On January 16, a standing-room only crowd of over 350 women and men from every geographic corner, economic strata, age range, and political viewpoint came together to gather the skills and inspiration to run for political office. The MCW was pleased, though not surprised, at the exceptional turnout for the event. Women are moving into the realm of politics at every level and want help doing it. During an update on MCW activities, Betsy Sweet, Executive Director, asked people who held an elected public office to stand and about 15 women did so (to much applause). When asked who was considering running for office over one third of the audience stood up!

The workshops presented all helped provide technical skills for those who wanted to be more involved. Topics ranged from managing a campaign to running a campaign, and from Basic Boot Camp for Partisan Politics to the ethics involved in running for office.

The day was incredibly full, very informative and inspirational to all of those who attended. In this issue are excerpts from the two keynote addresses by Shirley Chisholm and Danfridur Skarphenisdottir. Their presentations convinced us all that women are winners and the time is definitely now.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Legislative Issues	2
Family Medical Leave Act.....	3
Shirley Chisholm's Speech	5
Danfridur Skarphedinsdottir	6
MCW Annual Meeting	7
Nomination Form, Me. Progress Awards	7

PRESS STATEMENT JANUARY 11, 1988 WOMEN'S LEGISLATIVE AGENDA COALITION

Good morning. On behalf of the 23 member organizations of the Women's Legislative Agenda Coalition, I welcome you to our 1988 press conference, which marks our 5th season as the largest public policy coalition working with Maine's Legislature.

WLAC came together four years ago in the belief that all Maine people, regardless of economic privilege or social status, should participate fully and benefit equally from Maine's growing economy. Representing diverse interests, but speaking with a single voice on behalf of thousands of Maine citizens, we remain committed to that goal.

As we worked on this year's agenda, we realized all our issues focused on one central theme: addressing the needs of Maine families. For many years, the popular notion of "the family" has been the old Norman Rockwell model, with Mom at home and Dad as sole breadwinner, supporting 2.3 children in a suburban, single-family home.

In fact, that model represents less than 6% of all American families, with the remaining 94% no longer "fitting" the 1950's prime-time definition.

In fact, we are single parents, raising our children alone; we are merged families brought together by second marriages, supporting one another and sharing a home; we are teen parents, struggling to finish school and raise a child; we are seniors, consolidating household resources in order to maintain independence in our own homes; we are two young adults, with or without children or legal ties, investing our incomes towards the purchase of a first home; and, we are the traditional families.

As we prepared an agenda to reflect that reality, we used the American Home Economic Association definition of the family:

"... two or more persons who share resources, share responsibilities for decisions, share values and goals, and have commitment to one another over time. The family is that climate one 'comes home to', and it is this network of sharing and commitments that most accurately defines the family unit, regardless of blood, legal ties, adoption, or marriage."

In keeping with that definition, WLAC has developed and will support legislation that supports the economic security and independence of all Maine families.

First, we will fight for passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act, which

will guarantee Maine workers unpaid leave for the birth or adoption of a child, or the serious illness of a child, spouse, or dependent adult. This bill best represents how work and family intersect our economic landscape and how our public policy must accommodate the critical interdependence between the two;

We will advocate funding for child care, and skills training for parenting teens to help teach young men and women how to make good choices for themselves, their children, and their futures;

We will support funding for child care services for women entering substance abuse treatment programs, whose only option today is to place their children in foster care;

We will urge repeal of discriminatory provisions in the Maine State Retirement System and we will advocate a measure which will ensure all State employees, regardless of marital status, the right to freely designate a beneficiary;

We will vigorously defend Maine families' right to privacy by opposing passage of the "Parental Consent" referendum;

We will support legislation that will assure adequate health coverage for low-income and elderly Maine citizens; and

We will also continue our efforts to improve the quality of life and the standard of living for Maine's low-income families. We will propose a 10% increase in both the standard of need and the payment standard for AFDC families; and we will urge that AFDC benefits be indexed to the cost-of-living. In addition, we will support legislation that affords meaningful job training opportunities and benefits, and that ensures low-income families dignity, choice, and long-term economic independence.

Finally, we will support bills to make quality housing affordable for all Maine families.

We believe ours is a fair, sensible, and pragmatic agenda, one that squares public policy with family realities. These bills represent only a few of the many pieces of legislation we will offer this session. A more complete list is attached to your copy of the press statement.



113th LEGISLATURE: SECOND HALF

As we go to press, we are in the midst of a very busy and exciting legislative session. The second half of any session is reserved for "emergency measures", but there are still many items of concern. As always, much of the Maine Commission for Women's legislative work is being done in concert with the Women's Legislative Agenda Coalition (WLAC) whose ranks have grown to include 23 member organizations. What follows is the list of legislation supported by WLAC with the latest update on the status of that legislation.

LD 2284

Sponsor: Rep. Bost/Orono

AN ACT to Appropriate 2.8 Million Dollars to Implement the Job Classification Study of the University of Maine

Update: This bill would provide for the implementation of pay equity for the University of Maine's Clerical, Office, Lab and Technical Workers. The bill has been heard by both the Appropriations Committee and the Education Committee and both passage and funding seem likely.

LD 2324

Sponsor: Sen. Bustin/Augusta

AN ACT to Require Mandatory Medicare Assignment for Physician Service

Update: Proposing to ensure that all physicians accept Medicare assignment, the bill was held for Public Hearing before Business Legislation Committee on 3/14. Pending Committee consideration.

LD 2150

Sponsor: Rep. Clark/Brunswick

AN ACT to Provide Child Care and Child Development Training for Student Parents

Update: Unanimous "Ought to Pass" recommendation from Education Committee, approved by full Legislature. Amended to ensure that school-based child care services will also be available to adult students seeking GED or other diploma program.

LD 2205

Sponsor: Rep. Clark/Brunswick

AN ACT to Establish Child Care Availability for Individuals in the Substance Abuse Treatment System

Update: Proposes to establish on-site or contracted child care services for individuals entering in-patient substance abuse programs. Pending consideration before Appropriations Committee for approval of \$300,000 funding request.

(continued on page 4)

THE MAINE FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

This year, the centerpiece of the MCW's legislative agenda is the Maine Family Medical Leave Act. One of our priorities for 1987-1990 is to push for legislative and policy changes on the public and private level that will allow Maine families to integrate more successfully their work and family life.

Dramatic changes in the composition of the workforce over the past several decades have placed tremendous strain on family life. In the majority of Maine families, largely due to economic reasons, both parents are now working outside the home. Sixty percent of mothers with children ages three to five and almost half of all mothers with children under age 2 1/2 are in the workforce. By 1990, 67% of all two parent families will have both parents in the labor force and already more than half of Maine's 25,000 single headed households are headed by a parent in the workforce.

At the other end of the dependent care spectrum are the thousands of people in the workforce who must care for an ill elderly person or spouse. Nationally, it is estimated that 80% of people over 30 years of age provide some care for an elderly person.

Despite these far reaching changes in family and work patterns, many employees are not employed in businesses with policies offering job protection for parents concerned with meeting their child care responsibilities to newborn, newly adopted or ill children, ill parents or spouse, or in the event of a personal illness.

Consequently, Maine employees are often forced to choose between job and family responsibilities at the most critical moments in that family life.

Currently company policies in Maine vary widely and are often administered at the discretion of managers and supervisors. The lack of public policy and minimum labor standards in this area is a disservice to both employees and employers. A minimum unpaid family medical leave standard is necessary if family members are to continue to support and care for one another, maintain their economic security and contribute to the economic vitality of the state. That is why we introduced the bill.

As originally submitted, the bill would have provided 18 weeks of unpaid leave with benefits, but we were forced to compromise to meet business people concerns. As it has passed the House and Senate the provisions of the bill are as follows.

What the Family Medical Leave Law Does

Applicability - This law applies to any private or public business with twenty-five or more employees in Maine. This would cover 12% of Maine's employers and 74% of Maine's employees.

Eligibility - To be eligible for the provisions of this bill, an employee must have been employed for twelve consecutive months and must give 30 days notice regarding this leave unless prevented from doing so by medical emergency.

Family Medical Leave Requirements - This law entitles eligible employees to eight weeks of unpaid leave in any two calendar years for reason of

- 1) the birth or adoption of a child
- 2) the serious illness (as certified by physician) of employee, parent, child or spouse.

Serious illness is defined as

- 1) is in imminent danger of death
- 2) faces hospitalization involving an organ transplant, limb amputation or such other procedure of similar severity as determined by regulation.

The leave may be more or less than provided for in this statute if mutually agreed upon by employer and employee.

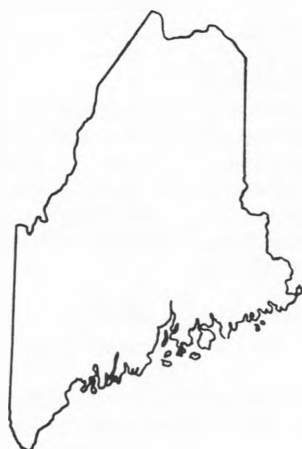
Job Protection and Benefits Status

- The law entitles employees who exercise their rights to family medical leave to be restored to their previous position with equivalent seniority, status, employment benefits, pay and other terms and conditions of employment. (Note: This subsection does not apply if the employer proves that the employee was not restored as provided in the subsection because of conditions unrelated to the employee's exercise of rights under this subchapter.)

Benefit Status - It is not required under this law that benefits be paid for by employer, but the employer must allow employee to pay to continue those benefits at employer's group rate.

Enforcement - A civil action may be brought to the appropriate court by an employee against an employer to enforce this subchapter.

As we go to print, we are awaiting the Governor's signature to make the bill law. When it does go into effect it is important that each of us spread the news and let families know about these rights and how to utilize them. If passed, this legislation will relieve great stress on Maine families.



PARENTAL CONSENT REFERENDUM NOT ON BALLOT

The Maine Christian Civic League and Maine Right to Life Committee fell 28 signatures short of the required number to put the "parental consent" referendum on the ballot this November. This referendum, if passed, would have required a minor to receive parental or judicial permission before seeking an abortion. Much thanks to Maine NOW, the Maine Civil Liberties Union, and the Maine Women's Lobby who gathered 93 workers who spent 1,121 hours working to verify that in fact there were not enough signatures (nor enough public support) to put this measure on the ballot.

(113th continued)

LD 2105/LD 2517

Sponsor: Rep. Rydell/Brunswick

AN ACT to Increase Work Incentive in the Unemployment Insurance Partial Benefit Structure

Update: Allowing part-time wage earners receiving unemployment insurance to retain a greater percentage of their benefits as they continue to seek full-time employment, the new draft increases the dollar amount disregard from \$10 to \$25, and further requires a report from the Dept. of Labor that will track some of the trends for people receiving partial benefits. Likely to receive majority support from the Committee on Labor.

LD 1705

Sponsor: Rep. Manning/Portland

AN ACT to Revise the General Assistance Laws

Update: Representing the majority report of Joint Select Commission on the Administration and Financing of General Assistance Laws, the bill proposes to: Index AFDC benefits to the cost-of-living; provide a one-time housing allowance for AFDC families; provide Medicaid continuance an additional 6 months for recipients returning to work; increase Medicaid benefits for first-time pregnant women; and enhance state reimbursements to towns for General Assistance costs. LD 1706, which represents the minority report of the Commission Study, excludes all provisions relating to reform of the AFDC laws.

LD 467/LD 2492

Sponsor:

AN ACT to Expand the Medicaid Dental Program to Include Adults

Update: Proposes an expansion of Medicaid dental benefits to eligible adults for emergency services, including acute oral surgical care for injury and other services necessary to relieve pain. "Ought to Pass" recommendation

issued by Human Resources Committee accepted by full Legislature; placed on Appropriations Table for consideration of \$431,678 funding request.

LD 2152

Sponsor: Rep. Priest/Brunswick

AN ACT to Clarify the State's Antidiscrimination Laws to Include Families with Children in Mobile Home Parks

Update: Extending current anti-discrimination laws against tenants with children to include mobile home parks, the bill is under consideration by the Committee on Legal Affairs.

LD 1984/LD 2534

Sponsor: Rep. Clark/Brunswick

AN ACT to Ensure Family Medical Leave in the State

Update: The Family Medical Leave Act received a 12-1 "Ought to Pass" report from the Labor Committee, a 90-47 "Ought to Pass" report from the House and 21-10 favorable vote from the Senate. It is now awaiting Governor McKernan's approval. See accompanying article for details.

LD 1948

Sponsor: Rep. Diamond/Bangor

AN ACT to Increase the Minimum Wage

Update: As of press time, received the unanimous endorsement of the Labor Committee for a \$.10 increase on January 1, 1989, and another \$.10 increase on January 1, 1990, if it would not take us above the New England average.

LD 1947

Sponsor: Rep. Diamond/Bangor

Resolution to Make the Language of the Constitution Gender Neutral

Update: Proposing to eliminate gender-biased language from the Constitution of Maine, this measure has received a 7-6 "Ought to Pass" recommendation from the State Government Committee. Due to be presented to the full Legislature for debate during the week of March 22.

LD 2212

Sponsor: Speaker Martin/Eagle Lake

AN ACT to Improve the Standard of Living for Maine's Low Income Children

Update: Proposing a \$2.6 million appropriation to provide a 10% increase in both the standard of need and the payment standard for AFDC families, the bill is under consideration by the Appropriations Committee.

LD 2242

AN ACT to Make Health Care More Accessible to Low-Income Elderly and Disabled Individuals, Pregnant Women and Children

Update: Proposing to establish a Federally-approved option that would increase Medicaid eligibility to elderly and disabled individuals, pregnant women, and young children whose

family incomes are below 100% of the poverty level, the bill is under consideration by the Appropriations Committee for approval of \$4 million state funding request.

Governor's Budget

LD 2390

Sponsor: Rep. Foss/Yarmouth

AN ACT to Establish the Additional Support for People in Retraining and Education Program (A.S.P.I.R.E.)

Update: The Governor's welfare reform proposal, "ASPIRE" aims "to provide greater opportunity for Maine's citizens who receive public assistance to achieve adequate income through appropriate employment opportunities". The \$13.4 Million program (\$7.7 federal share/\$5.7 state share) would establish a partnership between the Departments of Human Services and Labor to provide support services, assessment, pre-training, and educational employment referral services for AFDC recipients to attain self-sufficiency. This bill has been heard by both the Appropriations and Human Resources Committees. While supporting the objectives of ASPIRE, the Commission for Women and others have raised concerns dealing with technical aspects of the bill. Some form of this proposal will be passed and funded.

Child Care - The Governor has proposed that 3.5 million dollars be allocated to child care in Maine. *The Dept. of Human Services proposal includes money for private-public partnerships, training for child care workers, increased slots, sights for state workers and others. Overall, the package is receiving broad support.



THANKS

The Maine Commission for Women would like to thank the following Maine Corporations and Educational Institutions for their generous support of the conference and their support for helping women become involved in the political process.

L. L. Bean
Bates College
Central Maine Power
AFL-CIO
New England Telephone
University of New England

(Chisholm continued)

of Women. They said five words at the time, "We will remember in November!" and so many of the gentlemen, you know, laughed. And while beloved, dear Phyllis Shlafly was coming in with her ladies dressed in their pink and coming in with nice baked cookies and actually giving the men some nice refreshments while they were debating ferociously on the ERA, all we women who were there for the passage of ERA kept saying, "We will remember in November!" And true to our word, a concerted effort was launched in the three states. We defeated over 20 legislators who opposed ERA, and we replaced them with women's rights advocates.

One of the things that women have to understand is this, and I find this to be one of the most difficult things that women understand or fail to understand; the art of compromise. So many women entering the political arena or in the political arena feel that the word compromise is a dirty word, particularly when it's used in a political sense. Compromise is the highest of all the arts, because it is the cardinal principle on which this multi-faceted, variegated nation is built.

If you're going to be holding political office, first of all if you are a very rigid type of individual, and if you are an idealist, and if you are a real purist don't get into politics!

I'm going to close by saying this to you. The time has come when we will no longer be the complacent, armchair female recipients of whatever the politics of our communities or our nation will declare for us. As 52% of this population, that we will stand up with fire in our souls and demand to be counted. Forget what the world will say about you, because when you are not doing anything nobody says anything about you anyhow. So forget what the world will say -- whether you're in your place or out of your place. Tradition, my sisters, is no longer the answer to the problems that we are grappling with in our nation or to make it a better nation for all peoples. Think your best thoughts. Do -- oh dear God permit them to do their best deeds. Look up to no man walking this earth for approval of what you do. Because we have God given talent, we are educated, we have experiences, so we have no right to be making apologies to that which God has given us. Look up to no man walking this earth for approval of what you want to do or intend to do. You look only to God who ever your God is, and to your conscience for approval! That's all that you can do. I dare you to accept this message and do it! Thank You!



"WINNING WITH WOMEN: THE TIME IS NOW"

by Shirley Chisholm

Thank you. Thank you, thank you very much! I desire to thank all of you so much for that very warm welcome. And indeed, in spite of the cold, I am very glad to be here because I sense coming from you a kind of warmth in your hearts that is emanating through osmosis all the way up to the platform.

I know that the Bible said -- St. Paul said, "Let the woman learn in silence." Aeschylus, the great Greek philosopher, said, "Woman it is thy place to be quiet and to stay within doors." And the great German philosopher some 100 years ago, a gentleman by the name of Nietzsche said, "When a woman is inclined to learning, there is something wrong with her sexual apparatus." But, ladies and gentlemen, we are cognizant of the fact that all these things were enunciated by men.

I think we have to recognize, that as close to 52% of the population we do represent in these United States of America, that we too as females are a part of the genus "Homo Sapiens" of whom some are men and some are women. And, that there's no particular gender, in terms of the intelligence tests that have been forth coming for the last 50 years or so, that indicates either one of the two genders have a superiority of gray cranial matter over another one. But there are stupid men and there are stupid women. There are brilliant women and there are brilliant men. And what this country needs, and needs more than ever, is the capacity, talents, aptitudes and abilities of men and women who have it to give leadership and ultimately lead to an amelioration of the human condition. That is the bottom line.

But the old phrase of, "God helps those who help themselves," has now come to the fore in terms of we the females of America. As a result of the

second string of the women's movement in the 1960's, we learned that it was not necessary any longer to be shy -- to be reluctant -- about coming forth and indicating that we, too, would like to be representatives of the human race, even though we be females.

And we realize that for the many many years we spent in licking envelopes, walking through the streets collecting petitions to put certain individuals on the ballot, that had we depended on these individuals persistently and consistently we never would have been able to reach the particular level that we have reached in terms of being assemblywomen, senators, majority leaders, and speakers; all areas in which traditionally we have been left out because we are of the female species.

So therefore it is incumbent upon us to become involved in the political process so that we might be in a position to have impact on the legislative policies and on the public policies that determine to a large extent the quality of life that we are going to be able to enjoy. If for no other reason, we need more women's voices in your municipal bodies and your state legislatures and even in the United States Congress to be able to give leadership to those issues that deal with the most important resources that any nation has, and that is its children.

It is important, because the gentlemen -- for whatever their reasons may be -- are not usually interested or concerned in the issues that are very important to we who are the mothers, who are the natural instructors of the young. We need women to stand up in these bodies and speak out assertively, forcefully on the importance and the necessity for child care centers and day care centers.

We do not need gentlemen in these bodies with Neanderthal thinking speaking about the fact that when we talk about day care centers and child care centers we are speaking about a socialistic issue. Socialism! where have they been? They have no right to be representing us if they don't understand the dynamics of a moving and a changing society. The society in which we are living today in the United States of America clearly indicates that, for a whole host of reasons, women continue to be part of the labor force and they are escalating in said labor force.

A little bit now about some real theory of politics. Whether or not you realize it there has been an ongoing silent kind of political revolution, a revolution that during the past 15 years particularly has propelled women into offices in this country. Political analysts had billed 1984 as the year of the gender gap because, for the first time in our political history, women were seen as the pivotal players in that election year.

Many of us could not have dreamed at that time that Vice President Fritz Mondale would have had the foresight to . . . I wonder if it was foresight or something else. But anyhow lets be diplomatic, many of us could not have dreamed that Vice President Mondale would have had the foresight, and a nice Jewish word I like to use, and the chutzpah to make the choice of Geraldine Ferraro as his Vice Presidential running mate.

Now to put that choice, however, in perspective we need to take a hard and a long look at women in politics. Most women candidates do have two interwoven problems. One, they tend in too many instances not to be viewed as serious political contenders. Two, women have difficulty raising money because their candidacies are not usually taken as seriously as their male counterparts. And also, they don't have contacts; for example they are less likely to have a college roommate who is a partner in a downtown law firm. But once nominated, women find that not being one of the boys is a political tool that they can use against a male opponent, particularly during the last seven years. No woman has ever been involved in a Congressional scandal, or Watergate, Koreagate, Billygate, ABSCAM, and more recently the Iran-Contra hearings

The American people, and I tell you as I'm travelling I'm finding something very interesting, the American people are becoming more interested in women candidates. Not just any woman candidate, but a woman who has a certain kind of charisma, integrity, leadership, because we don't have to spend time running around trumpeting our integrity. People believe in it, they feel it.

We cannot sit back and wait and hope and believe that when they come out of their little meetings and conferences that they will come forth and say that, "We will place a woman on the ticket as a standard bearer for a particular position." They're only going to move if you push, if you fight, if you struggle, if you stand up and tell them with one voice in unison, "Enough is enough," and you begin to move!

It is a fact that in state races we are going to see another type of mini-revolution in politics. I will tell you why. In fact in state races I've been noticing that women have been able to demonstrate although sometimes long, although sometimes hard, sometimes very difficult but they've been able to demonstrate their political clout effectively. For example, during the final phase of the ERA campaign a few years ago when the Florida, Illinois, and North Carolina legislatures rejected that amendment, the women said - particularly the National Organization

(continued on page 4)



"THE WOMEN'S ALLIANCE OF ICELAND"

by Danfridur Skarphedinsdottir

It is a great pleasure and a privilege for me to have the opportunity to visit you here in Maine and participate in this conference. Although my apparent purpose for coming here was to tell you about the women's situation and the Women's Alliance in Iceland it has really turned out to be me learning a lot about your society and the women here in Maine from you...

Why is it that the Icelandic women are not happily enjoying their 80 years (of the franchise) and the political situation in Iceland, but have taken to proposing separate women's lists for election to local and national government?

In order to put the recent developments... in Iceland into perspective, I want to tell you a little from our past, because it has influenced us, knowingly or unknowingly... The first phase of organized struggle for women's rights was at the end of the last and in the beginning of this century... During the years from 1908 to 1918 women prepared separate women's lists for the communal elections...

Furthermore during the years 1922 to 1926 they also put up separate women's lists for the national elections... However, these women became very isolated among the men, whom they worked with and were met with a degree of hostility and lack of understanding...

The early women's associations and the women's lists were organized primarily around the franchise and did not have a general platform or programme. But the women believed that they had something special to contribute to the governing of their society. They saw women as possessing different cultural characteristics from men to be valued as both positive and necessary for the wellbeing of society...

During the years between 1960 and 1980 there was a great increase in the participation of women in the labor market in Iceland... In 1963 about 36% of married women were working outside the home but 20 years later in 1983 63% were actively employed. In fact, from 1983 to date, more than 80% of all women aged 15 to 75 years are employed in one capacity or another.

However, in spite of this contribution of work, women constitute the large majority of low salary workers with men having on average nearly 60% higher wages than women.

In addition, in spite of this increase in work participation outside the home, the majority of women still carry the largest share of the housework in most families. When they come out into the labor market they get little recognition for their valuable experience in terms of salaries or promotion. This double workload together with the fact that society has only partially met the changed needs of the woman and the family has resulted in a growing feeling of discontent and frustration among women. The increased need for improved social services e.g. responsible, educational day-care for children had been treated for too long as each woman's personal problem instead of being looked upon as a collective, social need brought about by changed social circumstances.

In 1975 when the United Nations declared the International Women's Year and the beginning of the Decade for Women, many women all over the country felt a need to demonstrate the importance of their share in the function of society. This was done on October 24th in an action called "Women's-Day Off", when Icelandic women made world news by putting society virtually to a stand-still by taking off and gathering publicly in large groups to demonstrate their solidarity. The fathers were left with their children which in turn left them rather unproductive at work that day. Although this was in essence a good-natured demonstration it was unmistakably a show of force. A force which is necessary to make society run smoothly and normally. A force which is inherent and inseparable from the fundamental work of women, becoming recognisable only when that work is not done. A force that can change the world but has not yet been harnessed by women for that purpose except to a very small degree...

It was from this soil of experience and ideology that the new women's slates arose in 1982 for the municipal elections in Reykjavik and Akureyri. Women felt the need for acting. They had really found out that "God helped those who helped themselves" as Shirley Chisholm said this morning.

Concerned women took a long view down the decades and coming across the first women's slates decided it was worth trying again.

An open meeting was called in Reykjavik where it was unanimously agreed by over 500 women to put forward a women's slate for the coming municipal elections in the spring...

Later the same year some of the women in Reykjavik started contemplating the national elections the following spring. After a lot of

discussions another open meeting was called in Reykjavik and this time about 900 women voted unanimously in favor of having a separate women's slate for the parliamentary elections... We only had about 6 weeks to write our programme, find women to stand on the lists, organize the election campaign. It was not easy any of it, e.g. getting women on the lists, we all seemed to be there to support some other women, but no one really thought of herself as a candidate. But the thumbscrews were gently manipulated and an impressive list of women candidates was produced where they were all titled housewives as well as indicating any other profession they might have.

Again our work was filled with excitement and joy and we managed to get 3 women elected into parliament... In April 1987 we stood again for the parliamentary elections and doubled our representation from 3 to 6 members or from 5.5% to 10.1% of the mandate...

We were running on a defined political platform based on the notion that women are a separate cultural group with a separate set of values from men. We rejected the liberationists notion of sexual equality but agreed with the early suffragists who had claimed that women are indeed different from men and have something positive and necessary to offer to the governing of our society.

We give priority to women's freedom of choice, focusing on the right of women to be judged on their own merits equal to men. Also that women's set of values should be regarded as equal to men's and have equal decision making in society.

Contrary to the suffragists and to some extent the liberationists we directly question the present authority structure and the set of values on which it is based as well as the order or priorities by which it is ruled.

We, therefore also want to change society fundamentally... We want to empower people to have more influence over their own lives and closest surroundings. Sharing and distribution of authority is one of our fundamental working methods. We are essentially a grassroot movement not a traditional political party. We have a non-hierarchical structure with no leader and at the beginning of our first parliamentary session in 1983 when they found out that we didn't have a leader they seemed to believe that we had forgotten this "important" thing!

When the women are inexperienced and even if that is not the case we support each other by going two and two together. This is not only supportive for us, it also disturbs the authority structure when well known politicians have to meet unknown women at a debate, whose strength and weaknesses they don't know, and then two at a time.

(continued on page 7)

NOMINATION REQUEST for the Maine Commission for Women 1988 Progress Awards

The Maine Commission for Women (MCW) wishes to announce its 1988 Progress Awards to be given to at least one individual and one organization or business that have made a significant contribution to the advancement of women and girls in Maine. The 1988 Progress Awards will be presented at the MCW's annual meeting to be held in June 1988.

Nominations may be made by an individual, organization or business and should explain in no more than 250 words or less how the nominee has made a qualitative difference in one of the following MCW priority areas: women, work and family (including such areas as child care, provision of benefits, pay equity, flexible workplace policies); the quest for equality (including areas such as affirmative action, civil rights, reproductive health); and the creation of a non-violent future (including issues concerned with domestic violence, rape, incest services for victims and preventive measures).

Please complete the following:

Nominee's Name: _____

Organization/Business (if any) _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Your Name: _____

Organization/Business (if any) _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

(Please type or print on a separate sheet, in no more than 250 words or less, in what ways the nominee has made a significant contribution to one or more of the MCW's goals as stated above.)

All nominations must be received at the MCW office no later than May 15, 1988. Please mail to: MAINE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN, STATE HOUSE STATION 93, AUGUSTA, ME 04333. THANK YOU.

MAINE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN ANNUAL MEETING

June 17, 1988

North Wing, Augusta Civic Center

5:00 - 6:00: Social Hour - Cash Bar Available

6:00 - 7:00: Dinner

7:00 - 9:00: Reports of activities of the Maine Commission for Women and presentation of 1988 Progress Awards

Cost: \$15.00 per person

_____ Enclosed is \$ _____ for _____ people.

_____ I will not be able to attend dinner but will attend the program at 7:00.

_____ I need child care: (Available through advance notification no later than June 6.)

_____ I will not be able to attend but enclosed is a donation to the Maine Commission for Women of \$ _____.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Reservations must be made no later than June 6, 1988. Please send to MCW, State House Station #93, Augusta, ME 04333.

WINNING WITH WOMEN - AT THE POLLS

At our "Winning with Women" conference, one of the most popular workshops was led by Ann Beaudry, a political consultant and co-author of Winning Local and State Elections.

The book that Ann and co-author Bob Schaeffer have written is a complete guide to organizing a political campaign, from planning campaign strategy and raising money to targeting voters and managing volunteers. It even includes the checklists, forms, sample letters, canvass scripts and news releases needed to conduct a successful campaign. Because it provides essential nuts and bolts information, the book has won high praise in the political arena. Texas Commissioner of Agriculture Jim Hightower notes that "Beaudry and Schaeffer provide invaluable insight for those on the verge of entering electoral politics at the grassroots. In concise, no-holds-barred fashion, they take the intimidation out of political campaigning and bring it to the door of the average citizen."

Copies of Winning Local and State Elections may be ordered by sending \$16.95 per book (includes tax and postage) to "Winning Elections", Box 1510, Harvard Square Station, Cambridge, MA 02238.

(Iceland continued)

Furthermore we do not want to produce professional politicians and think it is extremely important to keep good contact with life outside the parliament. This distribution of responsibilities makes it much easier for most women to participate actively in our movement and by rotating and sharing we build up confidence and experience in a growing number of women.

We have a detailed programme on all the major issues, claiming that all issues are women's issues as we are at least 50% of the population. However we form our policy from the point of reference of women, we rethink everything and take nothing for granted, not even our own existence as a political entity. We are the only political movement in Iceland, whose aim is not having to exist any longer.

Elections cost money but we have always managed to finance them, from the beginning and onwards by selling coffee, cakes, potted plants, old clothes, nightgowns, aprons, etc. to each other and sometimes we even manage to sell them to somebody else. But after we entered the parliament we have got a certain allocation of money

(continued on page 8)

(Iceland continued)

for our political work which helps a lot. However we are always short of money like most women.

It is very unusual for a new political group like ours to survive more than one election. We not only survived but doubled our following . . . There quite simply seems to be a growing need for the viewpoints and working methods of women within the political and decision-making processes in society.

We were one of the winners of the last elections. Those parties who were interested in forming a government, all saw us as a desirable partner in a coalition and they wooed us. We had freshness, they said, presumably our new, dynamic and successful way with politics and then of course we had something they all lacked: Women.

We are essentially an idealistic movement and we shouldered the responsibility of standing by our ideals, our visions. During subsequent opinion polls we have indeed shown an increase in our support, even to the extent of being the third largest party in the last one . . .

If we women want to survive within the present political system on our own merits in order to change it or at least influence it we need support from each other . . . It's hard in this male dominant society but I would like to emphasize

that of course the Women's Alliance is not against men it's for women and children. We believe that, that which is good for women and children is also for the benefit of men. I would like to quote a few lines from our platform which I think is a good way to explain to you our main ideas in a nutshell:

"The aim of the Women's Alliance is to make women's perspectives, experience and culture a no less important policy-making force in our society than that of men. The Women's Alliance wants to nurture and develop that which is positive in women's outlook on the world and harness it for the betterment of society as a whole. The Women's Alliance wishes to change society and put respect for life and shared responsibility first . . . Women still hold the low-waged positions on the job market and have fewer opportunities than men. Women are still responsible for unpaid work in the home, housework and child-care and their leisure time is negligible. Anything we can do to ameliorate women's situation will serve to make a better and more just society."

I want to end on a little note of optimism. Soon after our president Vigdis was elected she appeared on television. A little boy was watching and asked his mother: "Who is that?" "This is Vigdis, my dear, our new president." "Fancy that," the little boy said, "a

woman president". A few years later another little boy sat watching the news on television. A man appeared and the boy asked his mother: "Who is that?" "This is Ronald Reagan, my dear, the president of the United States," his mother said. "Fancy that," the boy said, "a man president".

Maybe this little boy's generation may dream of living in societies where women, children and men enjoy equal respect and equal rights.

We see it as our job that they do.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Calendar item: Casselberry-DuPree, highly acclaimed reggae artists, with roots in the women's progressive music circuits, will perform with Toshi Reagon and Annette Aguilar at the Bangor Opera House, April 29, Friday, at 8 pm. For tickets (\$8 & \$10) or info call the Opera House at 947-0200. BAGLSC, GBNOW and Wilde-Stein are very pleased to sponsor this event. It is handicapped accessible.

MAINE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
STATE HOUSE STATION 93
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

#####

Peg Stewart

Maine State Library #64 - 1 copy